



FINE PRINT

Literary Magazine

909



The Literature and Arts
Magazine of
Elizabethtown College
2020

Staff

Advisors: Dr. Matt Skillen
Jesse Waters
Digital Coordinator: Susan Krall
Editor in Chief: Megan White

Art

Section Editor:
Abigail Spessard

Board Members:
Ezekiel Ciafre
Julia Soltis

Creative Non-Fiction

Section Editor:
Samantha Seely

Board Members:
Mallory Forney
Ingrid Peura

Fiction

Section Editor:
Samantha Staub

Board Members:
Cailin Robinson
Sierra Rosa

Poetry

Section Editor:
James Moyer

Board Members:
Lauren Robitaille
Cas Stence

Layout

Designer:
Megan White

Assistants:
Hannah Soden
Ryan Strohl

Editor's Note

After working as Editor of Fine Print literary magazine for three years, this is not how I expected to spend my last year in this position. Fine Print has been an important part of my college career, and despite all of the changes we have seen this last semester, I'm so glad to have had the opportunity to finish working on this magazine.

I want to say thank you to the incredible staff of Fine Print. They worked especially hard these past few months to complete this magazine. I am honored to have worked with the group I had this year. I also want to thank all of the talented students who submitted their work to the magazine. Without their work, this publication wouldn't be possible, and I am glad we can give a platform to so many talented writers and artists.

This magazine has always had a special place in my heart, and I've loved my time working as Editor of Fine Print. It has given me the chance to be creative, to work with some incredible students, to experience the work of other Elizabethtown students, to hone my editing skills, and to create something worth sharing. I will truly miss working on this magazine, but I know I will be leaving it in good hands. I can't wait to see what future Fine Print Editors create.

Megan White
Editor-in-Chief

Contents

Fiction

Temporary Dissolution by Mikayla Ruth	Page 8
penumbra by Georgia Grimm	Page 18
Reflecting by Samantha Staub	Page 26
Melting by Megan White	Page 39
My Girl, Lydia by Hannah McConnell	Page 53
Nadie by James Moyer	Page 69

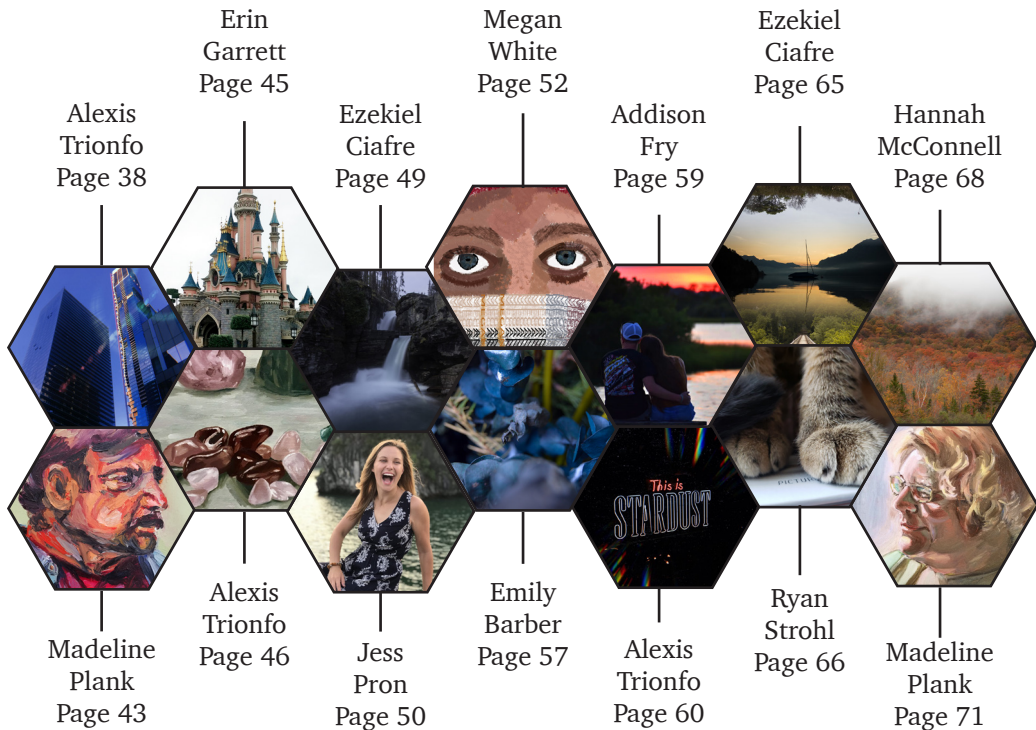
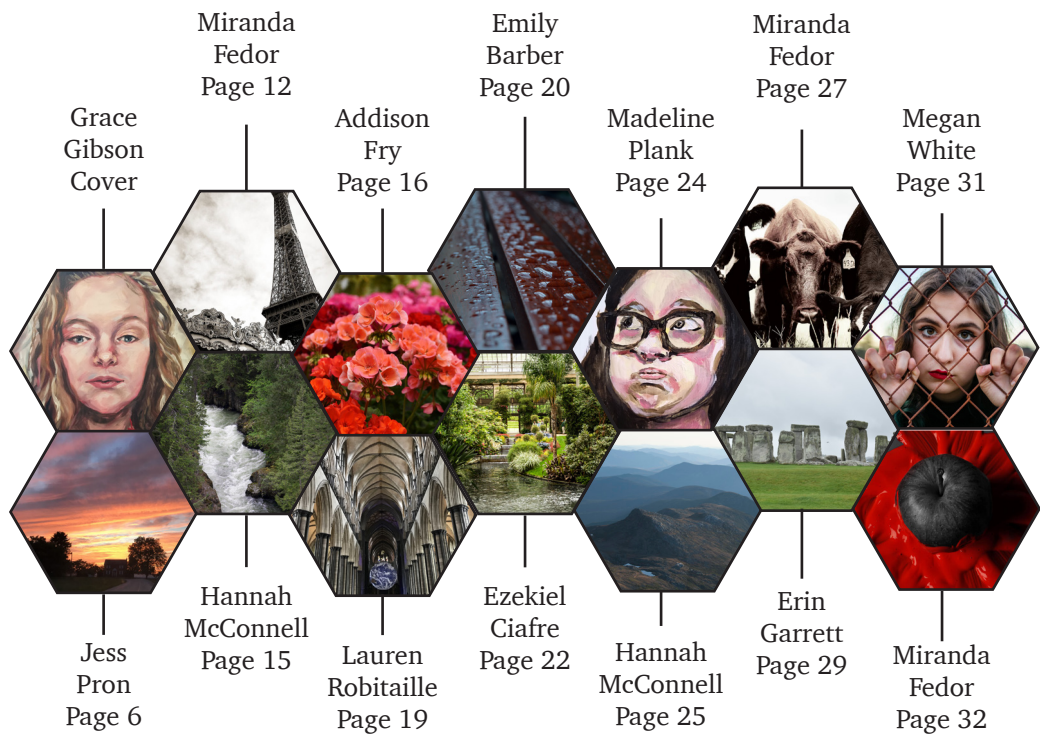
Poetry

Kaleidoscope Soul by Lauren Robitaille	Page 6
dying earth by Liam Coverdale	Page 7
hidden in plain sight by Georgia Grimm	Page 13
a love song/a tragic verse by Liam Coverdale	Page 16
Tremors by Ingrid Peura	Page 17
Rain-Storm by James Moyer	Page 20
I Don't Know if This is About You by Eli Kuklinski	Page 21
Constipation by Rachel Nelson	Page 23
Pollution by Paige Keyser	Page 23
Spring Thaw by Cas Stence	Page 25
Letters to Travelers by Samantha Seely	Page 28
First by Sarah Kaden	Page 30
Decay of Sleep by Paige Keyser	Page 32
When You Looked at Me by Delaney Dammeyer	Page 33
Hope by Cas Stence	Page 44
Slumber by Georgia Grimm	Page 46
Chopsticks by Rachel Nelson	Page 49
Cold Breath by Samantha Staub	Page 51
Our Porch, Our Place by Jayln Maulfair	Page 58
Can You Breathe? by Hannah Soden	Page 60
In Memoriam by Sarah Kaden	Page 66
This is not a poem by Rachel Nelson	Page 67
week-night ritual by Liam Coverdale	Page 70
Oh of Fruit and Wildflowers! by Paige Keyser	Page 70

Creative Non-Fiction

Sensory by Aprille Mohn	Page 14
99 Percent Identical by Grace Gibson	Page 34
Time Wasn't Catching Us by Jayln Maulfair	Page 47
Scallops by Samantha Seely	Page 61

Art



Kaleidoscope Soul

Lauren Robitaille

If my world was painted in black and white,
Would I know you?
I wouldn't know your indigo eyes and crimson lips.
I wouldn't know your chestnut locks gilded and bathed in sunlight.
Would I know all the colors you hold,
Locked in your kaleidoscope soul?

Would some things change or stay the same?
The imprints where we lay, the rose and oil splattered on a page.
The ivory flowers you gave me, one tucked behind my ear.
Would the Earth still look the same if we never knew each other's names?
Would the world still smell as sweet if we couldn't see?
Would I . . . ?
Would we . . . ?

A Long Drive
Jess Pron



dying earth

Liam Coverdale

across Western Alaska
thousands of salmon float
huddled, lifeless.
rivers once meant to carry life,
now a tomb.

in the Arctic
the ice dries up,
forcing the walrus to rest on rocky cliffs.
a single misplaced step
sends him tumbling
down

down
down

to his death.

polar bears
with walls closing in
wonder,
where did the walrus go?
our forests burn.
our oceans acidify.

the heat kills
the salmon, the walrus,
the polar bear the cheetah the elephant—
but not us.

us, well,
our shirtsleeves grow shorter;
our AC units work harder.
we still show up to work every day;
mow our lawns;
watch Sunday football.

like war,
like love,
like
anything
catastrophic,
it happens slowly at first
and then allatonce.



Temporary Dissolution

Mikayla Ruth

Things were slow that afternoon at the Mountain Inn. I just finished with the lunch receipts and Andrea was taking care of the two customers at the bar and the baseball players at the corner table, who were well into their third pitcher of beer. Afternoons were usually jammed packed with regulars, ranging from the Millers with all nine of their children, to Frank, the alcoholic, who drinks away the day until we have to kick him out because we're closed. So, I made a rare decision to take the rest of the afternoon off. This was just the beginning of unusual events to happen that day.

Driving home, I kept the window down to enjoy the crisp, October air and the sunshine playing off the cumulus clouds. A song played on the radio; one that sounded oddly familiar, like a dream you can only remember a small part of. When I was younger, on afternoons like this, I desired nothing more than the sunshine and breeze to go on forever, wanting to get lost in it all. Those were the best moments, because it felt as though nothing could possibly go wrong and all the evil in the world disappeared.

I drove down the long, windy road that leads the whole way to my house while reminiscing on past childhood memories, still listening to the odd, but somewhat familiar, song playing in the background. I passed the golf course, where few people were already taking advantage of the reduced afternoon greens fees, driving their golf balls out over the glittering lake by the second tee. I passed the baseball fields where competitive dads would battle each other and uninterested mothers would cheer for their husbands, and then they would all get drunk and eat food at

the bar that I ironically work at.

I passed my old high school where I was once popular and liked by almost everyone until senior year when I was bullied and made fun of. I remember, high school was all finally coming to an end. I had one more year left, and wanted to make the best of it, and then I had my first and only boyfriend. Very few people believed me when I said I was in a relationship. Many thought he was a part of my imagination. What was supposed to be the best year yet quickly turned to the worst 365 days of my life. I couldn't really blame them for not believing me, though.

Not only did my decision to fall in love affect me in school, but it affected within my own household as well. My family was disappointed because of the man I fell in love with. I was disowned by them and had no other friends to support me. My relationship may not have lasted, but at least I realized who truly cared for me.

I have a heart condition that basically means my heart can stop beating at any moment. I remember the many scares when my chest tightened and felt as if it were going to explode, but it is because of him that I am alive today. He loved me too much to let me go; I brought life to his soul. I felt tears begin to form in the corners of my eyes and quickly snapped out of that terrible memory as I arrived at my destination.

When I pulled into my driveway, something seemed wrong. Nothing looked out of place, yet something felt different from when I had left. The glistening sun and the cool afternoon breeze were still there, but it felt as though the light fluffy clouds were filled with precipitation and all sources of light had disappeared. I checked the front door, which was still locked; then I opened it with the key.

My chest tightened when I saw him there, sitting on the living room couch, smoking a

cigar, with a half-drained bottle of Heineken on the coffee table.

“Hey, now, I bet I’m the last person you ever expected to see today,” he said.

No truer words were spoken that day. I watched him study my face, gaining sheer joy from my torment. He did not even flinch when I dropped my keys in a loud clank against the wooden floor. Instead, he smiled brighter, a cracked toothy grin as his pale bony fingers flicked the ashes of his cigar into a crystal ashtray I had long forgotten about.

With his intimidating yet sultry voice he smiled and said, “Come on now Trish, can I at least get a smile out of ya? Damn, it’s been a whole year. Didn’t ya miss me a little?”

I couldn’t answer him.

My lips began to dry as I stood there in shock with my mouth slightly opened in awe. I felt the corner of my lip twitch as the shock emptied out of me and was replaced with sheer and utter annoyance.

He looked exactly the same since I last saw him; tall, dark, and slim. I would never admit it, but I knew deep down inside I missed him. He was my best friend and lover. I sacrificed so much for him, until I couldn’t handle it anymore. For days I forced myself to believe I wasn’t truly in love with him. I told myself I was blinded by the fact that he could keep me alive, but I knew that wasn’t true. It was the hardest thing I ever did.

The twisted thing is, my life began to improve when he went away. My parents started to talk to me again and my friends tried to reach out and apologize but, for some reason, I could not be happier that he was back. Rejecting his calls for what seemed like a year was easy, but turning him down in person seemed borderline impossible.

I felt a slight glimmer of happiness, but when I came back to reality, I remember raising my lip into a sneer and saying, “You

know, for someone who claims to be such a good listener, you

sure as hell don’t listen worth a damn when someone tells you to stay away.”

I made my way through the living room, stepping over his long, slender feet that were ever so delicately sprawled out on the floor in front of him. I placed my purse on the dining room table in a huff, rummaging through the pockets to search for my phone.

Already knowing the answer to his question, he asked, “Now, what could you possibly need to use your phone for right now?”

“I’m calling the police. You can’t just come into my house like you own the place.” I knew I was not actually going to call 911, but I had to act like I was angry so he would leave, even though that was the last thing I wanted to happen. I could tell he wasn’t the slightest bit concerned. His long slender body sat there confidently, drinking his bottle on my old living room couch where we spent many drunken nights on.

Completely disregarding what I said, a grin formed from his mouth as he said, “Should’ve known that was just a line when I saw that thick skull of yours.” At first I was perplexed with what he was talking about. He then threw his head back against the cushions of the couch allowing a roaring laugh to escape his rotted teeth. His chest rattled, causing me to stop and shutter for a brief second. “Guess we’re all guilty of a few little white lies,” he said. Still confused, I rolled my eyes and tried to ignore anything that came out of his deteriorated mouth. He reached for his bottle on the coffee table. “Sort of like that adorable one you spewed about still having your high school body.”

I slammed my hand on the table and jerked myself around to face him. I managed to catch a small smirk before he rested the green bottle

between his teeth. “Not that I minded much when I got to see for myself. You’ve always been a sight for sore sockets, Patricia. I was never disappointed.”

I rolled my eyes, walking over to the window by the front door where I had my small flower pots and cactuses growing. Much to my surprise, my once green and flourishing garden was now dried and browned. How lovely. “You never did have much of a green thumb,” I say almost spitefully, reaching down to grab a small watering can to attempt to salvage my garden.

He cracked his neck behind me and laughed. “Never had much of a knack for it. I’m much better at putting things in the ground rather than making things come up out of it.” I had to give him that one, but I did not let him catch my smile. Instead, I lifted my pots and carried them over to the kitchen sink. I turned on the faucet, allowing the water to fill the dry soil of the cactus.

He was at the dining room table now. His boney fingers tapped against the wood as he proceeded to watch me from behind. That was his trademark, other than his self-proclaimed ‘clever wit,’ how he managed to slither across the room without so much as a sound.

If he were paying you a visit, you would never see him coming.

When I turned to give him a dirty look, he simply gave me a small little wave. His charm never ceased to annoy me.

“I see the Evans’ got rid of their dog?” He asked in a half-hearted tone. I pressed my lips together in a smirk, wiping my hands on the towel hanging from the knobs of the cabinets.

“Saddest thing, he was hit two days ago. Helen was devastated.” Turning to open the refrigerator, I pulled out a bottle of water and said, “Never seemed to like you though, now did he? Always threw a fit whenever you were around. Shrieking and growling away.”

With a dull expression he rested his chin in the palm of his hand, shaking his head in what he expected me to believe was remorse. “Shame. He was such a character.” He gave a small sigh. “Ah, well. At least it was painless.”

“Why are you here?” Something I should have asked the second I walked through the door. He gritted his teeth in a bitter smile, pushing himself back in his chair to rest his arms behind his head.

“Just visiting. Don’t worry, I’m not here for business.” He laughed as he strummed his fingers against the wood of the table. “Can’t a tired man come home from work to check on his lovely woman?”

As I sat down at the table, folded my arms, and leaned back in my chair quirking up an eyebrow I said, “He could. If he still had a woman, that is.”

“Aww Trish, honey.” He rolled his neck. “You can’t possibly still be mad at me about that, can you?”

I sat up straight and stared Death right in the eye.

“You know how much I wanted that managing job. Nicole was the only competition, but the girl’s so dumb it’s a wonder she remembers the way to work.” I turned away from Death as I crossed my legs under the table. “But what happens a day before they announce the promotion? They find her hubby at the bottom of the lake sporting a brand-new pair of cement shoes.” I roll my eyes. “Who do you think got the sympathy vote then?”

He sighs, massaging the sides of his skull. “Honey. It’s not my fault he got in too deep. The mob’s been jumping the shark and doing my job for years. Messes with my schedule, but

saves me a trip.”

I see his fingers start to branch themselves out towards me. Wanting to take his hand, I

brushed him off quickly. "It's not funny, damn it. I wanted that job."

"Baby," He said in a sweet melodic tone, allowing his words to roll off his rotten tongue, "Is that why you've been ignoring my calls?"

I pout my lips deliberately, keeping my eyes glued to the wood pattern of the table. "I wanted that job. It would have looked great on my resume when I finally graduate. God knows the only reason I went back to school is so I don't have to work at that hellhole anymore. With that promotion I could have finally made something out of my life."

He chuckled as he pushed himself up from the dining room table, his thick robes floating like black smoke as he made his way over to where I sat. I swear the room seemed to grow darker the closer he was to me, but it wasn't like I had not grown accustomed to it when we were dating. It's amazing the exceptions one makes when they find themselves swooned by the charms of a tall man in black.

He turned the corner behind me and slowly clasped his bony fingers over my shoulder blades, massaging them gently. "Well, angel, I told you you're more than welcome to come live with me. Not the most lively of places, but at least it's tax-free."

I rolled my eyes, trying not to let him see the small smile that curled on my lips. "Life's not that unbearable, hon. I still got a few

reasons to keep this irregular heart beating. Plus, there's no angels where you're livin' babe." I turn to face him over my shoulder. "I don't suppose you of all people could quit a job like yours, huh?"

Tilting his head to his right, he flashed me a toothy smile. "Sorry, hon. How's about we talk about your job over some Italian tonight. I may need to double-check my schedule, but my planner shows your current manager's been hitting the burger joints pretty heavily lately. I might be paying him a visit soon." I let out a defeated sigh, slowly standing up to brush the dust off the back of my pants.

Although it was a year since we last spoke, everything seemed completely normal. It reminded me of the old days when we were together. "Fine. Let me change at least." He straightened his back to his full towering high, bones cracking as he did so.

"Wear something nice." With a flick of his hand, a tall dark wooded staff solidified between his fingers while a long slick blade pierced through the stillness of air above him. "Gotta make a small stop on our way there, seven car pile-up just a block up from where we're heading. Might be a camera crew."

I let out a long sigh and said, "Ugh. I hate being with you when you're on the clock."

He belted out a loud chuckle and replied, "Honey, I'm always on the clock, I'm the Grim Reaper."

Alone in Paris

Miranda Fedor



hidden in plain sight

Georgia Grimm

i am but a shadow
hidden in the corner--
observing everything
but never being seen.

do they know i'm here?
only some. i prefer
to keep it secret,
floating loftily above.

shyness? perhaps, but
more like subtle shame
and intrigue. i am
but a disguised witness

watching from above--
an unsuspecting pigeon,
perched, ruffled, and gray;
life bustles below.

all-seeing but never seen,
flying into cloudless sky.
keeper of knowledge
rests unacknowledged.

Sensory

Aprille Mohn

The rapid typing on the keyboard in the other room sounds the same as the crunching of ice. I suppose the two actions are much the same.

From experience, writing even one sentence of value can be much harder than breaking a full-sized ice cube with your teeth. From experience, writing can be as cold. Rereading a newly-laid thought can send spiking pains to the brain just as easily as chewing ice on the left side of my mouth, where the dentist assured me the filling had been repaired correctly.

Just because it “shouldn’t hurt” doesn’t mean it won’t. Doesn’t mean it doesn’t.

Ice is amongst the most common medical solutions to a mild physical injury. Ice helps to reduce the swelling — to make less of something. Ice numbs, but until it can numb the mind it will never be a cure-all. I would that it could do so. I would that a brain freeze meant more than some too-cold sinus capillaries and blood vessels which make themselves small, as if they could close themselves off from the world. As if anything can so easily close itself off from the world. As if anything is so easy. As if. But a brain freeze only brings momentary pain, and it is the job of the world to bring the pain that is less momentary.

Chewing ice destroys enamel, but perhaps it is inevitable that all protective layers are eventually rendered away. What’s one more? And yet the dog without teeth cannot bite. I would keep my teeth, and, with them, keep every ounce of viciousness I can muster. Then I would recommend others keep their distance.

Yet there is a craving for ice. There are a number of reasons and rumors for it. Chewing ice? Probably pregnant. That great undertaking to create a life from one’s self — to double your life force and set a lifeboat loose. There is a heavy, cumbersome cost to double a life. At any time or in any way it is managed. A baby has a lot of needs, and for better or worse will take the nutrients needed from a parent’s blood. Developing babies need iron — perhaps they feel the need to strike while it’s hot. It’s the iron deficiency that most people think of with an ice craving.

An iron deficiency: a shortage of metal, but not a bad time to wonder if you might also be lacking mettle. And if you can’t cope, might you want some ice for that injury?

Chewing ice helps pregnant parents-to-be fight off morning sickness. Can it soothe the nausea brought on by the realization that the world is a boat and we’re all on a grand journey through space? We cannot feel the earth move beneath our feet though we’re turning at a rate of a thousand miles per hour and hurtling around the sun at sixty-seven thousand miles per hour.

We depend upon our senses to guide us through the day, but when we cannot detect even the largest of things, it’s easy to question what else we’re missing and if we aren’t all too caught up on the silly things we feel.

People feel so much. It drives us — we let it push us up and down the streets and through the days into years. Yet, even in a moment, all this can be as ice and melt. And in becoming water, all these qualities dissolve and are all even harder to conceive of.

Destination: Whistler Mountain

Hannah McConnell



a love song/a tragic verse

Liam Coverdale

maybe this life would not be so tough—
it would be much easier to say
if love was enough.

as we swim through the same slough,
as we kneel down to pray,
maybe this life would not be so tough.

how quickly devotion turns to rebuff:
your father, your mother, together could stay
if love was enough.
hanging on a hopeless bluff

through the fire and the fray,
maybe this life would not be so tough.

when your friend's heart calcified to rough,
I think they would still be here today
if love was enough.

put each leg through the trouser cuff;
get out of bed to face the day.
maybe this life would not be so tough
if love was enough.

Country Greenhouse
Addison Fry



Tremors

Ingrid Peura

Every time a shiver goes up my spine,
I can't help but remember your touch,
the way your fingers laced together against the curve of my back
while you molded your lips
against mine, fusing my skin to yours.

Every time I see you,
I see the smile that I fell in love with
and the pool of lust in your eyes
that was enough to bring
me to my knees
before you.

Hearing your name brings me back
to our midnight conversations
in the dark,
back when love was kind
and your words planted flowers in my veins.

Every breath
reminds me that
after everything,
I was not enough
to satisfy your hunger,
that the taste of your lips
was the taste of a
desire so stale
that it could
kill
me.

Now I lay awake
crying in the dark,
wishing for your lips
against mine.

Please, just kiss me....

just
kill
me.

penumbra

Georgia Grimm

a deep hollow in the trunk of an old, grand elm houses the peering eyes of a peculiar creature, so intensely observing through the dark cloud of night. upon the nearby rustling of leaves, a silent response of feathery quills rises gently in the wind-chilled air, crisp with the damp of midnight in the depth of the thick forest. the faint whistle of a breeze through the drying leaves masks the sound of a lone doe meandering in pursuit of her comrades, searching through the night for the security of fellowship within the uncertain woods. she fails to notice the pale eyes watching intently from within the tree or to even sense the presence of such an elusive being. silence and searching they share in this black night, lacking even of moonlight. a fresh start and the embarking of a journey, a renewal of a pact made long ago when the sky made love to the earth and bore life on the fertile ground. only one eternal manifestation was created to roam the land, a protector from oblivion who lurks unseen and unknown to all other children of this birth. its silent flight defines the solitude of darkness, its breath the warm glow of the setting sun, and its chilling watch the dense fog of a frosty dawn. a true lover, neither male nor female, but eternal in all its material glory, shifting through space and time as both giver and taker, provider and consumer of wonder, fabricator of mischief and destroyer of all that does not reside within the balance of life; it watches the motion of the world around it.

Untitled

Lauren Robitaille



Rain-Storm

James Moyer

Have you ever felt a rain-storm?

Have you ever
Really felt a rain-storm,
Standing at a screen door,
Opening your lips to suck
The wind-whipped sprays,
Drinking in the energy?

Have you ever
Quaked at the crack of the thunder-boom,
Shivers spreading from your arms
To your skull
To your shoulders,
Tingling in your guts?

Have the waters ever
Spritzed your hot and weary eyes?
Has the nitrogen ever
Bloomed in your nostrils?
Has the rush of force ever
Pushed through you in the gales
With soothing ferocity,
Blocking woes from your ears,
Dissolving the world and anxiety?

Have you ever
Wished for it
To never end?

Seated Reflection

Emily Barber



I Don't Know if This is About You.

Eli Kuklinski

You're manipulative.
You're apathetic.
You live on a soapbox as tall as the Empire
State Building,

And I think you're scared to come down.

You play the victim because you can't bear to
think that you're wrong.
I don't think a sincere apology has ever left
your lips;
I imagine it's like speaking a foreign language
for you.

Just like caring and compassion and decency.

But why care about others when you don't
have anyone to care for?
Or so you say.
In your mind, you're alone and isolated,
But in the real world,

You're only alone because you want to be.
People care for you and love you
But you are so wrapped up in your own shit,
Most of which,
By the way,
Is easily solvable

If you would just let it be solved.

Hop off your soapbox one day,
And maybe,
Just maybe,

Your life won't be as awful as you make it for
yourself.

Longwood Gardens

Ezekiel Ciafre



Constipation

Rachel Nelson

It's ready.
It has to come out.
A MASSIVE,
STEAMING
Pile of words waiting to be born.
The painful cluster clutters
My intellectual intestines,
But I can't get it out.
Paper and pen lay far from my grasp
As I am forced to
Listen to boring lectures;
Finish my homework;
Do the chores;
Writhe in my bed at night,
Clutching at sleep as it slips from my fingers.
If I don't reach my throne,
My brain will explode.
I tremble and grit my teeth
Until I am released from my duties
So that I may take a well-needed dump:
Narrative flowing onto the paper
In blissful relief.

Pollution

Paige Keyser

Untold, untold: the sod that sops like glue.
With feet in warm but dead lagoon. Still try
And move to loons with stolen moods so blue.
It cuts the mind to crush the soul and die.

A face to prime. The brighten'd shine of star—
In turn, it hides the truth and lights a drape.
Don't ask the girls of things behind the bars.
The tread of black then comes to wrap its cape.

The kind of black to grind and spread its mass:
To scrape, to break, and pour the filth in cuts.
Insult the light, despite its might; so crass
To spill the hope of stars. Their blackened guts.

Self-Portrait

Madeline Plank



Spring Thaw

Cas Stence

It reminds of me of ice splintering my frail skin,
Gnawing at my bones, rending my limbs to tremors.

I keep hearing voices whisper in my ears, “It’s not fair.”

If they are true, then why am I not scared?

The heart beating in me refuses to thaw—
Just another problem;
Do I have to fix them all?

As the hours pass, so does my goodwill;
It’s almost like a lingering chill.

My ears block out the ticking of the clock,
Counting down the days until I hit bedrock.

“I’m too detached from the heart,” she says,
Which is bleeding fresh with blood:
A sign of true betrayal in our days.

The ice is cracking my smile;
She is starting to see me as a woman hostile.

I’m afraid to say that I knew all along,
That my kindness would eventually melt away.

Echoes

Hannah McConnell



Reflecting

Samantha Staub

Kate threw open the stall door and plopped down on the cold porcelain seat, leaning her head sideways against the stall as she sighed and relieved herself. Everything was spinning. Looking around at the dingy bar bathroom, she started reading the words and drawings that were etched into the blue stall walls around her. A penis drawn in black sharpie here, a number to call “for a good time” there; the usual, until she read a message on the wall straight ahead of her: YOU’RE GOING TO HELL KATE.

Sitting upright again, Kate chuckled. “Tell me something I don’t know.”

Kate struggled to pull the last shreds of toilet paper off the already empty roll and then went to wash her hands at the sink. Furiously rubbing her hands together with scorching water, she looked up into the mirror and met her own gaze. A pang of guilt hit her stomach as she looked herself in the face for the first time after what she’d just done.

The world stopped around Kate for a few minutes as she stood staring at herself. After letting the water run over her hands for so long that they began turning bright red, she snapped back to reality.

“Shit! Shit, that’s fucking hot.” She shook her hands off and hastily wiped them on her shirt as she turned towards the door to leave; then it caught her eye. Right there, scribbled in neon red lipstick on the mirror beside her, was the same message that was scratched on the back of the stall door. YOU’RE GOING TO HELL KATE.

“Okay, what the fuck,” Kate mumbled, with a touch of panic slowly churning her stomach. How did she not notice the huge red letters sprawled on the mirror when she first walked

in? She looked around the bathroom, ducked under the other stalls to check for feet, and confirmed that she was still alone. She was about to walk out and brush it off as a weird coincidence when she saw it again. YOU’RE GOING TO HELL KATE was now scratched in harsh gray lines on the outside of the stall door where she had just been. Kate knew that hadn’t been there when she walked into the stall – she definitely would have noticed.

Kate slowly walked closer to the stall door and reached out her hand to touch the scratched metal, completely in awe.

“Fuck!” Kate yelled as she pulled her hand quickly away and stuck her pointer finger in her mouth. The scratched metal door was suddenly red-hot to the touch. Kate looked on the ground and noticed fresh metal shavings by her feet. The words must have been newly scratched, even after she peed less than 5 minutes ago.

“That’s impossible. I’m not fucking crazy... I’m not fucking crazy!” Kate tried to convince herself as she backed away from the stall door, still staring at the inscription. Suddenly, she fell backwards and hit the ground hard as her foot slipped on something hard and smooth. Kate’s palms caught her harsh fall and were immediately cut by shards of broken glass that were scattered on the floor around her. Confused, bleeding, and terrified, Kate turned to look at the bathroom mirror behind her that was now shattered to bits on the bathroom floor, shards with red lipstick surrounding her in a perfect circle. The sharp edges were all pointing towards her.

At that moment, the stall doors all swung closed and locked simultaneously, all except for the one with the haunting words etched into it, which was slowly swinging on its hinges, squeaking as it opened and closed. Kate leaned over and vomited, but instead of the seven beers she’d just downed slopping on

the floor, a tiny, gray mouse scurried its way out of her mouth, onto the floor, and out of the bathroom.

Reporting live for KBC News, this is Wendy Marin. CEO Kate Winston of “Barely Natural” cosmetics reportedly found dead in a bar bathroom last night shortly after giving her cosmetic company the go-ahead to start testing their products on animals, despite some serious backlash from her community. Investigators are ruling it a suicide and

eyewitnesses at the scene describe her manic episode that started at the bar of a local pub. One woman reports watching Winston pull lipstick from her purse and frantically scribble illegible words on the bathroom mirror. Before the witness left, Winston was reportedly carving the same message into the stall doors with a pocketknife. The witness ran out of the bathroom and heard a large crash followed by a scream. The woman did not turn back, but contacted authorities who rushed to the scene.

Grazing

Miranda Fedor



Letters to Travelers

Samantha Seely

To the woman on the S8, Richtung-Wiesbaden,
You put your hair up, tying it into a bun with a long stem of a flower,
Wild lavender pulled from the bunch sticking out from your backpack,
And in the heat of that day, of that train packed with bodies, the scent was sweet and cool.
You swayed and mumbled along with the song thrumming in your earbuds
And tied your dress up around your thighs.
A girl had stared at you, in shock at your eccentricities, I suppose,
But you paid no mind.
I was glad that you had set your bags down just before the doors started to close,
That you had jumped in nearly a second too late.
It had been a day of stress and heavy movement and sweat,
But in that moment, you were a presence that brought the world into focus.
We both got off at the airport.
You disappeared into throngs of other travelers.
I wonder about you now,
About where you were going,
Where you picked the flowers.

To the kind businessman,
Suit and tie and coiffed hair,
You said goodbye with a smile and a wave,
A “Gotta bounce” to the small woman
Who had been seeking your help.
There are moments in traveling that remind one of a connection
We all share.
You had paused and asked if she was alright;
You helped decipher the foreign words around her, gave directions;
You smiled and stood and talked with her as she spoke of her son
Who she hadn’t seen in a long while,
Who she couldn’t wait to see.
Did she remind you of someone you knew?
Your mother perhaps, or a sister.
Or maybe not.
The “why” doesn’t matter, in the end.
You acted, outside that hurried airport,
A place where seconds are counted
In anxious looks at security lines and gate numbers and departure times,
And that does matter.

To the child,
All of two years old,
Soaring through the air,
Sitting in your mother's lap,
Is it your first time flying?
You seemed excited, at first,
Unbothered by the slow shuffle down the aisle,
By the belt pulled across your lap.
Then the engines began to push,

And all we could hear was that rumble,
Pushed from our wings into our bones,
And your piercing wail.
As we climbed and hung in the sky,
Your mother soothed you,
Your tears slowly drying.
You'll be fine,
I promise.
But it's okay to wail, too.

Stonehenge

Erin Garrett



First

Sarah Kaden

We snuck away—left the others behind
to laugh and gossip, wonder where we'd gone.
There's magic in a secret, stolen kiss
that's ours alone when we hold each other
in darkness: bodies moving; gentle touch.

It was not perfect; awkward speaks more truth.
I didn't know myself or how to touch
a girl just right. I fumbled, fingers scared.
My body was a stranger; how was I
to know another's before I knew mine?

But somehow, this all felt so right. My lips
were red; they traveled down her body soft.
I found her tender spots and kissed them 'til
she shook. I held her close and heard her gasp.

And after, holding her so close and lost
in her soft eyes, I knew she was the most
perfect woman my eyes had ever seen.

Emma

Megan White



Decay of Sleep

Paige Keyser

To one in light, a lack of fright. But cold—
A room with posies black and wraith now seen.
Of heart and hands once strong, once dry, once bold,
Aghast with breath cut short from air now keen.
How sounds turn pois'n to fickle-drip a reen:
A creek of freaks turns gush of stream to drip.
Now show the smile that coils around its mien.
Of mind's own will, you feel how tight its grip;
It drags a claw on sheets which leaves a rip.
The king of fears does stay with stricter hoyles.
It crawls with cracks and gitts and snaps a hip.
Yet lack of screams from prey that see no toils:
The room so still, a tear not shed. How raw.
Alone you stay, with sights on empty maw.

Disappearing
Miranda Fedor



When You Looked at Me

Delaney Dammeyer

I find myself in lonely heroes:
Champions of trudging,
Of seeing your own wonder
So much that I did not know the power
Of being looked at . . . and seen.

We met in a crowded room, dense
With talking, clacking, cup-clinking—
Raucous boy-and-girl noise.
When I spoke, you turned fully
Shoulders to shoulder, eye to mine.

We mopped the floors and counters,
Shining mirrors with crumby rags,
And you wanted to see a big, big world,
One that I had lived in, so your eyes
Looked to me for discovery.

We sat above the world, scarves blown
South towards the mountain,
The night diving deeper above,
And we looked out at the same plane
Looking for answers, wisdom.

When I look at you, I see
A beautiful eye for other people:
The belief that all things matter;
Specialness as a preexisting condition
Into which we are all born.

And in your smile, the wholeness of it,
The way it becomes your entire face,
Spreading to all the corners like oil—
You live with a happiness
Most people only dream of.

You never look at your watch,
Running late, but running free,
Knowing that there is always time

For a cup of coffee, a cigarette, a chat;
You live in reality, not beneath it.

And in time, you grew into my heart
Like vines: little grasping fingers
Curled around the rough bark of the tree,
Reaching for the sky, pulling away
My pugilist fists around the core.

I did not know that eyes had power
Like funny stones and broken bottles.
There is something there—the world
Puts faces in the facets, and often
Shows us what we need to see.

It was a grueling day: a walkabout
Through hail and social fire. I
didn't think I had the strength
to sing the songs we picked,
But you said it would be fine. I tried.

And when you looked at me,
In among the funny-mouths,
I saw a face that screamed,
So sincere and proud and real,
“I believe in you. I believe in you.”

It wasn't sadness, but your eyes
were soft, waning, blue;
That big mouth, a little Mona Lisa smile.
Your shoulders folded toward me,
And you looked right into me.

For the first time, I felt seen:
Understood and qualified, tangible
And real, beautiful and deep,
Encrusted in jewels, singing
With a voice that didn't crack.

99 Percent Identical

Grace Gibson

I am writing a story, and so I will start with words.

Return. Tolerant. Charter. Gravel.

Linguists argue about the exact number of English words in existence, but my Oxford English Dictionary requires two hands to lift, and so I'm prepared to accept the lofty estimate of a million.

Democratic. Vegetarian. Seed.

I have one million pieces of language at my disposal to tell this story. According to a test I took on the internet last year, I have over 32,000 of those words directly accessible in my arsenal.

Publicity. Activate. Horoscope.

One million words from a twenty-six-letter alphabet. A deceptively finite toolset to build a seemingly infinite vocabulary, each of the words a different combination of between one and 189,819 letters. Each story I tell is just a permutation of twenty-six symbols and the spaces between them.

Trick. Decline. Crevasse. Animosity.

The longest English word is the full scientific name of the largest known protein. At over 189,000 letters, it's more manageably known as titin. Stories are made of words of letters, some of them long enough to require three hours to pronounce. An even more finite set of those letters spell out the stories in our DNA, the repeating bases that are strung into chains of three billion links, labelled simply as A, T, C, and G. Adenine, thymine, cytosine, and guanine, their letters repeated and sequenced and recombined, spell out the code that tells the world how to create us. We are written like stories with words in four letters; our chapters are our genes. AAGTCGCG is a sentence in a language our bodies read, an

instruction that initiates the first spark of our being.

My genetic code gave me my blonde hair and blue eyes, my height, my metabolism. I know that one sequence buried in my genome tells my body to have a predisposition for alcoholism. Because of a gene called TAS2R38, I dislike the taste of coffee. And a group of six genes tells my skin cells to produce a low number of the molecules we call melanin. The thorny societal issue of skin color is a matter of six genes, an enzyme called tyrosinase, and a misattributed significance to a natural range of human possibilities.

The nebulous force that is "society" wants to simplify and reduce the truth in these stories. The truth, though, is that even the story told in DNA is far less simple than we want it to be. Only one percent of DNA actually consists of genes — human genes are a fragmented novel floating around among internet message boards, miscellaneous song lyrics, and IKEA furniture instructions. The detritus of DNA consists of sections that regulate the genes, extraneous fragments, large areas of repeating sequences. There are portions of the DNA that exist to copy and reinsert themselves into other areas of the genome, like a boisterous and unwelcome party guest. Our DNA has to protect itself against its own intrusion. If DNA is a story, it's War and Peace: no coherent genre, an overabundance of story lines, tangents abounding, philosophical and religious musings interrupting the narrative told within. The impulse to reach sweeping conclusions about genetics relies on an ideal genome with none of the complications of reality. As is often the case, the story is more complex than its popular depiction.

I can't control that the melanocytes in my skin produce more light-colored DHICA-eumelanin instead of the darker DHI-

eumelanin any more than I can deactivate my need for oxygen. But I live in a society that has written stories of how individuals from each group should be, and I am on the kinder side of those narratives because of my white skin. Those stories that start with DNA end in racism.

~

I can't control my skin pigmentation, but I can control what I choose to do with the privilege it affords me. Retrospectively speaking, I don't think studying abroad was the right choice to make. It certainly isn't true that studying abroad is only possible for white students — there were several students of color within my program — but the population of students with the resources to have this experience are, admittedly, mostly white. The stories that have limited opportunities for people of color in the United States since its inception are still at play, reducing wages and increasing prison sentences and affecting lives in ways I will never comprehend. I live in a country that was founded on racism, among a society of wealthy white families whose familial wealth came from slave labor, and I benefit from that history. I can regurgitate facts all I want, though; it doesn't change the fact that I used those benefits to essentially go on a three-month vacation. Even in the view that my study abroad experience came directly from my college attendance, my ability to attend a private institute resulted from the same privilege. Any way you look at it, being white and from a financially stable family brought me to this place where I am now, and it took me to Florence, Italy.

My time in Florence was constantly tinged with the sense of “I am not supposed to be doing this”— a sense that, if I had the resources and opportunity to run away to Europe, I surely could have done something far more productive with all that time and

money. Perhaps I could have aided the fight in worldwide LGBTQ liberation, or organized action against the horrific treatment of refugees and asylum seekers in my home country. But no, I thought I should go to Europe instead.

My first few weeks in Italy felt like I was constantly watching myself and thinking “The audacity!” — like an out-of-body experience. Maybe that was a fault of mine, refusing to be fully present in the moment out of disbelief. It was a combination of genuine awe, in the vein of I'm really standing on ground that is not in the US for the very first time ever, and that sense of betrayal, even, that I decided to do this rather than follow some grand gesture of goodwill. Maybe it was, in a way, an insult to all of those deserving people who would have been fully present, who just didn't have the privilege my story holds. Therein lies an issue with which I grappled for the duration of my time abroad: how to fully accept and enjoy my experience while reconciling the extreme privilege that allowed me to have it.

These are the times when I regret having gone abroad at all. I have no good “defense” for the fact that I did this — I feel like I need to excuse myself for following through with it. No amount of musing or questioning will erase the fact that I am a very privileged person who chose to exercise that privilege in an almost flamboyant way.

There's this sense that I'm not supposed to acknowledge any of this — that I'm supposed to accept this privilege as my normal and avoid thinking about it too hard lest I feel guilty about it. But that's part of my story now. I chose this; it's the narrative I created within my life. I'm not one to say that things happen for a reason, but I doubt I could continue on without rationalizing those reasons and writing those coherent plots after the fact. It's what I'm trying to do in writing this. I need

to find how this fits into my life. I need to pinpoint a place for my time abroad within the larger context of my ongoing life in the states, as an artist, as a student.

I find it vaguely embarrassing to even get into the topic of studying abroad, if I'm truly being honest. What can I possibly say — I decided to hemorrhage my euros in Italy for a few months? That part is true, but nobody wants to hear that, right? We all want to continue believing the myths of white supremacy — that all of this is earned and deserved rather than built from a system of inherent inequality and subjugation.

All humans are 99 percent identical, genetically speaking, but those shared stories diverge when they come in contact with reality.

~

I passed the same Romani women begging on the streets every day in Florence. In English, the common word we have for this population is a slur: g*psy. I came to know the women by their braids, their pink wedge sandals, their long skirts. I stopped wearing long skirts myself, fearing the association that my skirts might have produced in others' minds, the stories others might read into their folds. The Romani women with their trailing skirts would weave between tourists in the busiest parts of the city, mostly surrounding the Duomo, shaking paper cups full of change and pleading with the crowds in pitiful, half-crying tones. In the orientation for my program, the program leaders told us to ignore them — everyone did. For some members of the Romani community, this was a way of life; they considered begging a career, and even the Italian Supreme Court recognized begging as a

Roma cultural practice.

Any research into Romani communities reveals the enormous prejudice and racism they face. They're repeatedly slandered and their humanity denied; they're forced out of their homes and communities. Throughout all of Europe, my host country is the one with the most negative perception of the Romani. But those were stories I only uncovered after my daily contact with this culture was a memory, a remnant of a life I no longer lived. In the moments I spent near the Romani, I was always in a race to move further away. The fact that everyone else around me shared the same goals doesn't make my actions any more noble. I accepted the stories telling me of their untrustworthiness, of the harm they might do. I had enough euro coins rattling in my wallet to buy me a gelato or three on the way to class, coins I could have quickly slipped into their plastic cups, but each day I chose not to. Even when given a daily opportunity to be charitable and giving and open and a force for change, to be the kind of person I like to think I am, I didn't.

And so I return to wondering what I can truly say for myself. I know with absolute certainty that my story will never consist of their plots. The whole time I was in Italy, the acknowledgement of the begging and pleading people on the street came with the assurance that their story is entirely estranged from my own — theirs will never be my experience. The story granted to me, the privilege and the power, means that I cannot know their truth; I will always be insulated from the reality they inhabit. I will always be traveling down the streets on the way to class, with the ability to stop and buy a gelato should I choose, and

they will be desperate and ignored. What started as the story of base pairs and hydrogen bonds transformed into one of cultural misunderstandings and penniless desperation.

All of the English words at my disposal can't capture their stories. We're 99 percent identical and a million words apart.

~

Stories perennially undergo simplification. When we tell stories, we're not just concerned with truth; our tellings are complicated by human impulses of dramatics, and artful language, and understandability. Even when I tell my own stories, I know they're imperfectly told — to be more enjoyable, to appeal to a wider audience, to fit them into a larger narrative. The stories within this piece are removed from truth even when I attempt to tell them truthfully. Words on a page, even pictures on a page, even both, can't capture the complexity of a lived story.

It's like titin. None of us want to wait three hours for our doctors to pronounce titin's full name — we just need to know that we're at risk for cardiac disease. We sacrifice meticulous accuracy for the sake of our bodies and their stories, to spend three hours examining potential treatments rather than droning a single word. Likewise, the stories I tell will always be separated from truth by at least a thin film. There will always be some artfulness or forced narration obscuring an objective truth that no longer exists within my telling of it. That's how we create our stories — trying and forgetting and reducing and simplifying. And trying again, and forgetting and reducing and simplifying.

We say "I loved studying abroad" when we mean "Studying abroad was a complicated

experience, and I have a lot of complicated feelings about it."

We say "I ignored the Romani women on the street" when we mean "I thought about the Romani women and their hurt every day."

We say "titin" when we mean something much longer and more unwieldy, something whose complexity exceeds our ability to easily manage. Because that's how stories are. Just imitations of a life too expansive for these twenty-six letters.

~

One of titin's roles is to provide structure to the chromosomes, where DNA is located. We invented the longest English word to describe the substance that physically gives support to the origin of our stories, our language, our letters. We exist to make decisions and derisions, to create words and the stories they build, to pass judgments and beggars on the street — to give a 189,000-letter name to titin — because of titin itself.

We can tell stories because of the story that told us.

Chicago

Alexis Trionfo



Melting

Megan White

His eyes are on me, but I don't turn around. I can't. My neck is stiff, my eyes facing forward. I wrap my fingers tighter around my cup and wish I had gotten my drink to go. Morgan always serves my cappuccino in my favorite mug with a free biscotti that I'm sure she could get fired for.

I appreciate it every day but today.

I try to nonchalantly take a sip of my warm drink, but it is scalding instead of comforting, and I almost sputter it back up. I compose myself and return my mug to its saucer, cringing at the tiny clinking of the porcelain.

I can picture his smile at my flustered movements.

The bell over the door rings, but I know I'm not lucky enough for him to be leaving. A chair scrapes at a table next to me. The register dings. A barista calls out an order. Everything seems ordinary.

No one knows my life is in danger.

I know if I get up now, he'll know what I'm doing. He'll just follow me anyway. I need Morgan to come over here, to see my fear and understand what is going on. She is the only other person who knows the whole story. She would know to get me out of here. I glance over at the counter, but she is flirting with some blonde who is trying to place an order. I try to catch her attention, but her eyes twinkle up at the customer. She's gone. She is lost to me.

I turn back to my table and look down at my hands, making a point not to look around at the rest of the coffee shop. I fiddle with my ring, the one I still can't bring myself to take off. I know he'll smile at that. It will give him hope, tell him something I don't want him to know. I'd take it off now if I didn't think

he'd notice. I'm sure he's already analyzed everything about me.

He's seen me sitting at our table, right by the window so we could people-watch together. He's seen me scribbling in the notebook he got me for my birthday the last time we were together, with the pen his mother bought me for my college graduation. They both knew I wanted to be a writer. He's seen me comfortable, maybe even happy. And now he is here to disrupt that once again.

My entire body tenses as that all too familiar, husky voice fills the small space. My breath quickens. My heart pounds through my shirt, ripping a gaping hole through the fabric, my skin, my bones. I'm exposed. I freeze.

"Can I get an iced caramel latte, extra cream, please?" My old order. The drink I stopped ordering three years, seven months, and thirteen days ago. I feel nauseous just thinking about forcing it down my throat now.

"Sure thing." Morgan is gone, probably on break. Her coworker, a bubbly brunette takes his card. I watch the exchange out of the corner of my eyes. His shirt sleeve slips up as his arm extends, exposing the expensive watch on his wrist. The one I bought him for our first Christmas together. His dark tattoo snakes up his arm, disappearing as his shirt sleeve falls back into place. I fight back the disappointment as it goes out of view.

He moves to look at me. My eyes snap back to my lap. I can feel his gaze, and for a moment, I feel like running, but last time I tried that he caught me.

I ended up with six stitches in my forehead.

The hiss of the espresso machine makes my head spin. I lean my temples into my fingertips and let my eyelids drift shut, though I've learned what happens when I look away. I've also learned that guard up or down, he's more powerful than I am. His presence takes up the entire room. My space has been compromised.

Nowhere in this city is safe.

I should have left when I had the chance.

“Wendy.” It takes me a moment to open my eyes. They are sealed shut. My heart falls into my stomach. My stomach falls to my feet. I melt into the floor, oozing into the middle of this coffee shop.

When I finally open my eyes, there he is, in all his charming glory. His hair is freshly trimmed, spiked up the way I like it. His goatee is full, and I can feel my hands running through it. It’s his eyes that captivate me the most, that caught me even from the beginning. The sharp green is so abnormal, so enthralling, you want nothing more than to stare into them forever. They got me every time. They get me now.

He holds out the cup to me. My name is written on the side. My heart stops.

“I got your favorite drink.” I swallow, allow my heart to beat once more. Only once. My tongue has expanded to fill my mouth. Puddles sit in my palms and drip onto the floor. I’ll slip in them if I try to get up. I stay rooted to my spot.

“I don’t drink that anymore.” His hand clamps tighter on the cup. It’s subtle, but I notice. His grip loosens.

His gaze travels to the ring glimmering on my finger. The tiny diamond, my own pick, is blinding me now, taking my sight away bit by bit. I stuff my hands under my thighs and let the ring dig into my skin. I’ve been wearing it three years, seven months, and thirteen days too long.

He places the drink on the table and invites himself to the seat across from me. I scoot back as he scoots in. It’s instinctual. This is a cat and mouse game, and he always wins. I don’t know why I even try. He doesn’t either.

“Relax, Wendy.” He is amused. I almost laugh, but I can’t. If I laugh, I might choke. If I laugh, this will feel too familiar. He smiles

at me, his straight teeth glaringly white, and I cringe. He leans forward on his elbows, his hands clasped in front of him. I get a glimpse of the tattoo again. I can hear the tick of his watch. His fingers flex, drawing my attention. He wants me to look at the ring on his finger, the one that matches mine. I squeeze my thighs down harder on my hands. Feel the pinch. It’s not even a fraction of the real pain I feel.

“Why are you here?” My voice is a mouse squeak. I am weak. He flexes the muscles in his arms. He is strong.

“This is our favorite place.” He’s right, but it was mine, alone, for the past three years, seven months, and thirteen days. I really should have left when I had the chance. And he knows it. “And you still come here.”

“Like you said.” I want to lean back, to show he isn’t getting to me, but there is a steel rod in my spine. “It’s my favorite.”

“Because of me. Because of the memories.” I want to argue, but I can’t. I want to tell myself he’s wrong, but it’s true. Despite what he’s done, what he’s put me through, the danger I’ve been in, I can’t leave the memories behind. That’s why I still wear the ring. Why I still come here. Why his clothes are still in my drawers. His scent still lives in my house. His number still sits in my phone. His initials are inked on my wrist. He is forever in my heart.

“You can’t be here, Charlie.” His name is sawdust in my mouth. It spills out on the table between us. Somehow, he doesn’t see it pile up. I wipe it away. He thinks I’m grabbing for his hand. He reaches for me, and I pull away too fast. Close my eyes. Suck in my breath. His jaw clenches. The vein pops out. The eyes flash.

All of the oxygen sucks out of the room.

“I’m not in trouble anymore, Wendy.” His voice is calm. He isn’t. I’ve upset him already, in a matter of minutes.

"You can't be near me." He lets out a small laugh. Nothing is funny, but he laughs. He rubs a hand over his facial hair. I want to do the same. No, I don't. I dig the ring in deeper.

"That restraining order was bullshit." His voice is a whisper. It sounds like canons in my ears. "I did my time. I'm done." Boom. Boom. That slip of paper was freedom. Those bars kept me safe. He was gone. I was protected. I could live my life again. He reaches out for me. I'm not ready to reach back. Not yet. "We can work this out, Wendy."

My head is shaking my disagreement before I can get words out. Thankfully my head is working faster than my heart.

"I can't." The scars all over my body tingle at once. It's a familiar ache. I hate the comfort. I love it.

"I know you've missed me." He's right. "You know I've changed." He's wrong. "You love me." Can he be both right and wrong at the same time?

"I need to leave." I move slowly, testing his reactions. He doesn't move. Somehow, that's worse. I put my phone in my pocket, my notebook in my bag. I take one last sip of my drink. I stand up and he does the same. His presence looms over me, reminding me how small I truly am. I shrink into myself and I melt again.

"Charlie--"

"Fine, let's go." He's challenging me, and I've never won a challenge. Breathe. I need to remember to breathe. I return my cup to the counter. Morgan's shift is over. The bubbly brunette barista smiles at me. I thank her. She smiles at Charlie. She thinks he's handsome. She's jealous I'm leaving with him. I'm jealous of her. At the end of her shift, she'll go home to a normal life and not worry about covering bruises or how to stop the bleeding. Wondering if this will be the time he takes things too far. Again.

There is glue in my throat as I pull my jacket on and place my bag on my shoulder. There is nothing I can do. Charlie knows where I live. It's where he used to live. I never even had the locks changed.

Maybe I hoped he'd come back.

"Ready?" He holds out his hand to me. I stare at him a moment, trying to find something else to do with myself, but all I can do is nod. I don't take his hand. My one small victory. It doesn't last. As soon as we make it out the door, he puts his arm around my shoulders. I become stone. My legs move on their own accord. Step by step. Back to the life I knew I'd never truly escape from.

My world is slowing down as we enter the faster movements outside the coffee shop. No one else seems to notice. To everyone else, it is just another day. Charlie's fingers dig into my shoulder, each one reminding me of the hold he has.

Step. Cement blocks replace my shoes. Step. Lead drips down my legs. Step. Or is that sweat? I'm suffocating in my own body heat. And his, standing so close to me. He is a fire, roaring next to me, scalding my skin, leaving a burn.

"You can't come with me, Charlie." I stop in the street. His grip tightens. No one spares us a glance, and I want to scream. I want to grab the girl walking the opposite direction and shake her. I want to rip the young boy's earphones out and make him hear me. Why can't they see it? How are they all blind, deaf to what is right in front of them?

How am I?

"I've changed, Wendy." But his eyes tell me the truth. I've memorized the signs by now. Tightening grip. Blazing fire in his gaze. Shortened breaths that seem uncontrollable. I know he can't stop himself. I know he can't resist. Nothing's changed. And yet. "I'm coming home."

Maybe he hasn't changed, but have I?
Maybe I'm strong enough to fight him off this
time. Maybe I can scream louder or run faster
or fight back or load the gun or—no.

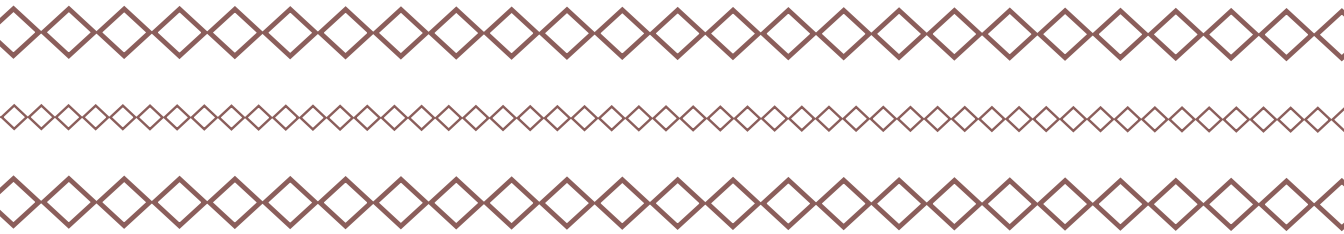
My apartment isn't far. Only another block
to go, and I'm running out of time to figure
out what to do. He sees it. His eyes light up,
and his excitement is palpable. How can I
crush that? How can I tell him no? I can see
him trying. He's doing that for me. It's always
for me. Maybe I'm wrong about him. Maybe I
owe him another chance.

He can feel me softening, wearing down.
I can feel it too. My body softens into clay,
pliable in his arms. I fit into his side so
perfectly. How could I have forgotten that my
puzzle piece matched his? He grabs my hand,
squeezes three times. Our old signal. A river
of warmth flows from temple to toes and I'm
melting, but for a different reason, for a better
reason.

We make it to the porch, and I pull the keys
from my pocket. They jingle beautifully in our
own bubble. Nothing can pop us. I find myself
smiling at him, and I wonder what I was so
worried about before. This is the man I love,
nothing more, nothing less. Everything he
does, he does out of love. How could I have
forgotten that? I didn't even realize what I was
missing the past three years, seven months,
and thirteen days.

We walk up the steps.

"I love you, Wendy." He nuzzles his scruff
into my neck, making me giggle, his favorite
sound. I stick the key in the lock, the last
piece of the puzzle, and enjoy the soft click
signaling our new start. I open the door and
we walk inside.



Palette Knife Man

Madeline Plank



Hope

Cas Stence

Ever feel that warm, tumultuous feeling in your stomach,
Similar to the bloom of a flower out of destroyed soil,
A shining pearl covered, coated in soot?

The world is constructed on the basis of yin and yang, good and bad.
Both share their balance, but one breeds misery and jealousy.
The other offers pure bliss, the true combatant of misery.

As a person alone, I am no good.
A worthless piece of garbage,
I was born without so much as a talent.
It's impossible for me to be of any use.

Of course, we cannot dismiss those born with a greater destiny than my own:
Those who will combat the negativity; the chosen ones.
I can do nothing else other than bathe in the euphoria.
Life is too complicated to be black or white.
We're all living in shades of grey, but perhaps,

Maybe, the blinding white light will manage to crack this dark world.
I don't truly know; I have no place in a world like that.

My role is one of subordination.
I am but a vessel for others, dissected by choice.
I am here to only further their drive; I cannot be used any other way.

When I meet my fatal end,
I would ask you not to cry.
It was always my fate to become a placeholder.

And for that warm, tumultuous feeling?
I would brandish the knife myself.

Sleeping Beauty's Castle

Erin Garrett



Slumber

Georgia Grimm

soft, soft steps
pitter patter
like a tiny mouse
delicate tiptoes
across carpeted floor
plush stockings
clambering quietly
up creaking stairs
floating on stilt legs
heels lifted with
years of practice
a secret endeavor
of sorts if you will
questing silently
while you rest
sleeping soundly
delicately reclining
on a makeshift bed
undisturbed

but for the dreams
inside your head
spinning, weaving
quizzically deceiving
reality and replacing
thoughts with lofty
creations built upon
connections stored
brow furrowing
what are you thinking?
sitting still i see
while penning ideas
to paper with intent
deep breaths
calming and filling
tired chests and
beating hearts.

Rocks

Alexis Trionfo



Time Wasn't Catching Us

Jayln Maulfair

Do you remember that relentless feeling you experienced as a senior in high school when the month of May finally arrived? How you looked around at all of your classmates and thought, “can I please just be done with these people already?” Or how you were desperately counting down the seconds until graduation day, so you could finally move on to bigger and better things? Unfortunately, I thought about these questions constantly throughout my senior year at Mount Calvary. I simply couldn't wait to be done with high school forever; and unfortunately, I found myself wishing away some of the most meaningful people in my life because of my preoccupation with the future. Although I had this apathetic attitude, the other night I did something I never dreamed I would do — something extremely out of character for me.

After spending an embarrassing amount of my evening on the isolated first floor of the library, huddled over my Biology textbook in sheer confusion, I decided to take a much-needed study break. I pulled out my earbuds, then my phone, and proceeded to slump down into the chair as far as I could possibly go. Since my brain was severely overworked and exhausted, I decided it would be easiest to just hit shuffle and listen to whatever song randomly played. By pure coincidence, a song called “When We Were Young” by the Lost Kings, began to play, which instantly connected me to about a million precious memories. Laying my head back, I clung to each one of the lyrics, letting them transport me back to my class' senior beach trip to North Carolina, which looking back on it, was actually one of the best weeks of my life.

After the song finished, I gathered all of my

books and spontaneously jumped into my car. I decided I was going to take a drive. I drove through the evening, following wherever my subconscious would take me, and surprisingly, I eventually found myself back at my old high school. Instinctively, I even parked my beat-up Subaru in my “unassigned, yet assigned” parking spot, where my car sat all throughout senior year. Since I was so intent on graduating and only returning when I absolutely had to, my high school was the last place I thought I would end up that night — but ironically, there I was. I turned my car off, and I just sat there, looking up at the building I grew up in. The building I made friendships in that would last a lifetime. The building I experienced my first heartbreak in. Some of my favorite memories were made here. I remembered study halls with my best friends, where we did nothing but laugh, qualifying for districts with my teammates, who became like family, and all of my favorite teachers who always believed in me when I didn't even believe in myself.

Sitting in my car, I could still hear Katelyn, my best friend who has since moved across the country for college, complaining to me about our utterly impossible history homework in homeroom. I could faintly smell the glorious, spicy aroma of the cafeteria on Fridays — better known to the students of Mount Calvary as “walking taco day.” I could even feel the scratchy fabric of my horribly outdated chorus uniform that I never in my life thought I could possibly miss. Why did I wish all of this away so quickly?

While walking through Mount Calvary's quaint hallways in middle school, I would often find myself peering through the glass panes of the doors, looking into each of the classrooms, smiling at the familiar faces looking back at me. As I entered senior year, I was so tired of knowing everyone, and even

worse – everyone knowing me. I wanted nothing more than to be just another face at a college. Now, as I walk through circuitous college hallways, I look into the large, plain classrooms, and all I see is unfamiliarity. Somedays, I feel like no one knows who I am, and I find myself desperately longing for the comforts of my high school. Even though college is often so enjoyable, I can't help but feel like something is missing. I now realize that the new will never feel the same as the old because it lacks those meaningful memories.

As the lyrics in "When We Were Young" rung in my ears that night, I was reminded of the overwhelming love I feel for my second family. Since I was one of 23 individuals that comprised Mount Calvary's class of 2018, I

had a unique schooling experience. Being surrounded by the same 22 people for the first 18 years of my life was often a curse, yet it was even more so a tremendous blessing. My classmates have directly shaped who I am today, and even though they infuriated me at times, they ultimately became my second family, who I would sacrifice anything for. Even though I was in such a rush my senior year to move on and start the next phase of my life, I am extremely thankful for all the lessons they have taught me and all of the fond memories we now share.

I now know this: live in the now instead of obsessing over what is to come, and don't forget to stop and appreciate what you have before you eventually have no choice but to move on.

Chopsticks

Rachel Nelson

I grasp them in my fist
And tweeze a roll of sushi to my lips.
Fishy flavors dance upon my tongue.
From the corner of my eye,
I spot a woman in a kimono
Speckled with cherry blossoms.

Decorative ornaments pierce her golden hair
Like chopsticks in a bowl of rich ramen.
Dainty fingers are pressed
Over her ruby red lips
As she chuckles at a joke
Uttered by the man sitting across from her.

He smiles softly
In adoration of the Asiatic beauty
As scents of seafood and seasonings
Waft through the air.

St. Mary's
Ezekiel Ciafre





Cold Breath

Samantha Staub

I watched her as she breathed
A white cloud into the cold air,
Huffed,
Her cheeks and nose rosy.
I was jealous of that breath because it had been inside her,
Felt her warmth and touched her mouth,
Experienced her body, and yet,
I was mad at the air that left her simply because it left.
Did it not realize how lucky it was?
I wish I was that breath of air, but only in a world
Where time moves backwards
So that I could be sucked back in through her plump, glossy lips,
Rub against her wet tongue as I pass through,
Travel down, and settle somewhere deep inside her.

A Trip to Remember

Jess Pron

Typographic Portrait

Megan White



My Girl, Lydia

Hannah McConnell

I sat in the booth and faced the door, waiting for her to walk inside. We'd agreed to meet at a shithole diner, when all I wanted to do was take her out and treat her to the luxurious dinner she deserved. She did not deserve lukewarm coffee and grimy walls with the paint hanging on for dear life. She did not deserve rambunctious children screaming at their parents for ice cream or the curt response from the lady that took my order. Lydia should've been walking into a five-star restaurant in that little black dress of hers that I adore, wearing cherry red lipstick and her flashy heels. She would've smiled at me and my heart would've jumped knowing she was my girl. Now the thought of her being someone else's girl made me want to run into traffic or strangle the man that gets to lay beside her at night. I stared out the rain-stained window with my mind racing and my stomach in knots.

"Excuse me," I heard Lydia say as she walked in the room past a family that was trying to leave. My eyes darted towards the door, and I watched as she hung up her coat and folded her umbrella, like a gentle angel. She looked out the window and smirked, but before I could get a chance to see what had caught her eye, she turned and saw me sitting in the booth across the room. She flashed a half smile and started towards me.

"Hey, it's good to see you," I blurted out, my voice shaking as I got up for a hug. When she put her arms around me, I could smell her classic French perfume. *Le Cœur d'un Amoureux*.

"How has it been, Jeremy? I heard about your job. I am so sorry. Have you started

searching for a new one yet?" she asked as she pulled away and began to sit down.

"Oh, you know, it could be worse. It's not the end of the world," I said with a fake laugh. She gave me a concerned look and attempted to change the subject.

"How's Phil? Are you still crashing at his place?"

"Yeah. He's been great. Say, why did you want to meet up? I mean, it was random and out of the blue, Lyd. It's so unlike you," I said as I went to grab her hand. Before she could pull away, I felt the ring on her finger and a flash of pain punched my chest.

"That's what I wanted to tell you," Lydia began as she toyed with the massive diamond on her ring finger. "I'm getting married to Joshua next Fall, and you haven't finished signing the divorce papers." She sat and stared at me, as if the forms would magically appear signed and she could go off on her honeymoon tomorrow.

"Josh? Really? Give me a break," I said under my breath, leaning back on the patched-up booth seat waiting to wake up from my dream.

"Don't start with me," Lydia said in an angry whisper. "I'm trying to be nice and you're making this difficult."

"Oh, I'm making things difficult!" I shouted to her in a mocking tone. Silence fell among the restaurant as the eyes of every customer peered at me, a lunatic shouting at his soon to be ex-wife inside a family diner.

"Suit yourself. You're going to need these," Lydia said as she threw an orange folder at me and headed towards the door. I watched as she walked away, and I imagined her heading towards the car after our fancy dinner in that goddamn black dress that hugs her hips in all the right places. As she left, I peered out the window and watched her get into a Cadillac with someone in the driver seat. They pulled

out and sped off quickly, leaving me alone with bitter coffee, gawking customers, and an orange folder that made me want to strangle Joshua Krinsky.

Angry tears welled in my eyes, but I pushed them away, threw cash on the table, and ran to my car. The door opened with a creak and I forced myself inside, dripping in rainwater and disappointment. As the thunder let out a loud crack overhead, I watched a lightning bolt burst, illuminating the sky. A picture of Lydia and Josh flashed in my mind, flooding my veins with rage. I yelled, slamming my fist against the steering wheel and rocking my body like a maniac. Starting the ignition, my tires twisted and whirled as they screeched against the wet asphalt, but I didn't care. I drove, and I drove fast to the liquor store.

I pulled up to the apartment and didn't bother locking my car doors. With a swift motion, I flicked off the bottle cap into the street and began chugging the cheap whiskey as if it didn't burn. I felt a warm tingle rush over me, and I smiled after looking at Phil's empty parking spot. Walking up to the apartment door and fumbling to find my keys, my phone vibrated, and my smile grew wider when I read the message.

Skye: what r u up to? i can bring drinks after work, i'm off at 10:30!!!

I replied and imagined Skye showing up in Lydia's little black dress. Attempting to drown out thoughts of Lydia, I blasted music and got ready in a drunken daze. My body flushed with dread, and I could feel my stomach sinking, until I heard a heavy knocking from the apartment above me. I ran over to the radio, turned off the music, and sunk into a somber sleep on the floor.

A heavy knock at the front door startled me awake. I jumped up quickly and felt the blood rush to my head. The room was spinning before me as I tumbled to the door and failed

to unlock it.

"Who's there?" I said with a belch. My eyes wouldn't open, and I began to sway.

"It's Skye. Are you okay? Let me in," she said, her voice uneasy.

"I'm, uh.... not feeling too good."

"Open the door and let me help you."

"Just go away, Skye. I'm not in the mood for your goddamn games tonight," I said before walking away. I heard a smack against the door and footsteps down the hall. Walking to the kitchen, I couldn't erase Lydia from my mind. Thoughts of her overwhelmed me as I poured myself a glass of brandy. The smell of her perfume brought tears to my eyes, and I kicked myself for not holding her longer when she gave me a hug in the diner. Taking my glass, I headed towards the closet in my room. I tumbled to the ground, pulled out an old shoebox, and drew the brandy close to my lips. Closing my eyes, I finished the glass, and opened the dusty box in front of me.

Handwritten letters, old film photos, movie ticket stubs, and holiday presents spilled out as I dumped the contents of the box onto the floor. My tears fell onto Lydia's love letters she'd written me in college, smudging her cursive writing into an inky mess. I tossed the notes to the side and picked up a stack of developed photographs from our vacation in France during the Summer of 2005. The first picture was a photo of us kissing at the top of the Eiffel Tower, Lydia's hand stretched out to the camera with her engagement ring shining against the sunset. I could see the smiles behind our lips and the way we held each other so tight; we didn't want to let each other go. My smile faded over time, and I wept, realizing my happiness depended on Lydia. I flipped the picture over, and read the note scrawled on the back in Lydia's handwriting. *Mon amour pour toi est infini.* Laying down in the closet, I held the photo to my chest and

waited for the booze to numb me.

It was noon the next day when I woke up. The minute I opened my eyes, I started to get a migraine and felt the nausea kick in. Peeling myself off the floor, I walked to the kitchen and grabbed a can of beer from the fridge. I plopped down on the couch, turned on the T.V. and stared at the screen, my mind wandering. My phone started buzzing and when I looked to see who had texted, Lydia's name popped up on the screen. My stomach dropped and I read the message. Don't forget about those papers. A wave of hope overwhelmed me, and I imagined what my life would be like with Lydia again. I looked over at the orange folder and I felt it staring back, mocking me. Without hesitation, I ran to the folder, slipped out the papers, and ripped them to shreds. Looking at the mess I'd created, I walked to the trash bin and tossed the scraps. Before walking away, an ad on the newspaper laying in the trash bin caught my eye.

Conoy Tavern

Bartender Wanted – Inquire Within

Putting down my beer, I grabbed the paper and headed toward the bathroom. I looked in the mirror and saw a disgruntled man with a thick five o'clock shadow. He looked like shit, and I grimaced at myself in disgust. Staring down at the paper, I looked back up and imagined myself, clean shaven with eyes full of life. I imagined Lydia walking up behind me and pecking my cheek, and an invigorating rush passed over me. I'm going to get her back, I said to myself, as I began to draw a hot shower.

It had been three months of working overtime, picking up shifts, and convincing Lydia that I was on to something before I finally moved out into my own apartment. She'd bugged me about the divorce papers once a week, and I managed to shyster myself

from completing them till she was at the brink of taking me to court again. It was 6:48pm on a Saturday night, and Lydia was about to show up any minute for the papers. Sweating with nervousness, I finished last minute chores and watched the clock intently. There was a knock at the door, and I rushed to spray myself with her favorite cologne before going to answer.

"Jeremy, hi," she said, stunned. She looked me up and down with an astonished face.

"Come on in," I said with confidence. She walked inside and glanced around with hesitation before taking a seat on the couch.

"Minimalistic. I like it. Quite a change from the way you lived before, don't ya think?" she blurted out, shell-shocked by my lifestyle change. I smirked at her and didn't reply.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Yikes! Was that rude? I had a glass of wine or two a little bit ago and I might be feeling it. How's the job going?" She asked, reverting the subject.

"I love it! The manager is kind of a dick, but that's typical. Let me make you a drink."

"I don't know. I probably shouldn't stay long..." she said as she made her way towards the new orange folder she'd given me a week ago that was sitting on the counter.

"Hey, I need to impress you with my bartender skills before you go," I said as I walked between her and the papers, forcing her to follow me to the liquor cabinet.

"Pick your poison," I said. She grabbed a brand-new bottle of rum.

"I'm feeling tropical. How about a daquiri or a mojito?" she said, handing me the bottle and heading to the couch. I felt my body melt as she gave me a look of longing, a look of hope. I walked towards the kitchen and grabbed two glasses, filled them with ice, and poured each of us a drink. Watching her flip through the channels, I took the orange folder and slipped it away into a drawer.

We talked and shared stories like old

times and Josh's name never came up. We continued to drink and let the memories take us back to the past. Whenever she smiled, I smiled, and whenever she laughed, I laughed. Remembering the picture, I ran to the bedroom without telling her where I was going.

"Jeremy! What are you doing?" she yelled as I headed into my closet. I flipped open the lid to the box and grabbed the Paris picture laying on top.

"Look what I found the other day," I said as I handed her the photograph. My heart was racing as she scanned the photo, touching the edges with care. She flipped over to read the back, and I watched Lydia cover her mouth to hide her reaction. When she looked up at me, her eyes rang with wonder. Before we knew it, the clock struck midnight and she was on top of me, kissing me like she had been waiting for this moment since she walked through the door. I could taste the liquor on her lips, and I felt the heat of her body against mine. As I took off my clothes, I watched her take off her own; our aura reeked of rum and regret. I ignored it and we headed toward my bedroom.

When I woke up the next morning, Lydia was gone. I walked around to each room, but there wasn't a single trace of her being in the apartment, as if she was already beginning to hide her tracks. The glasses were cleaned and put away; the blankets were neatly folded at the end of the couch. A tinge of guilt washed over me as I laid on my bed and reminisced about the night before. With a sudden realization, my stomach dropped, and I ran towards the kitchen. Heaving open the drawer, I saw the orange folder laying on top of dish towels and heaved a sigh of relief.

When I called Lydia later that evening she never answered, and it took her a week to return my texts messages. Her responses were

short, and full of regret, guilt, and shame. Her cold distance was tearing at my heart, and whenever I wasn't spending my time at the tavern, I found myself looking back at the shoebox in misery. It had been nearly a month and a half since we slept together, and my nerves were through the roof. I was dozing off on the couch after a long night at work when my phone rang. I saw Lydia's name and picked up frantically.

"Lydia! Hey! How are you?" I asked with excitement.

"I missed my period, Jeremy," she said quickly. There was silence from both lines, but I felt a smile forming. She's mine again, I thought to myself.

"Are you going to say anything?" she said with an attitude. I could see her through the phone, biting her nails and tapping her foot anxiously.

"So, does that mean what I think it means?" I asked, trying to play dumb.

"Yes. I just took a pregnancy test."

"Well, congratulations!" I managed to blurt out while I did a happy dance behind the phone.

"This is a goddamn mess."

"No, Lyd! This is great news! You've always wanted a baby, and I know you will be a great mother. I know this is scary and I know you're feeling all types of emotions, but I am here for you. I will support you. I will do anything and everything for you, Lydia." She left out a sigh, followed by a short silence.

"I have a doctor's appointment at the end of the week. I'll call you back then and update you," She said and hung up before I had time to reply. Laying back down, I looked up at the ceiling and imagined Lydia and I bringing home a baby of our own.

The week went by quickly, and I made sure to call off work, so I'd been available when Lydia called. It was nearly ten at night when I

got a text.

Lydia: took a paternity test and it's not yours. meet me at empire diner @ midnight. bring the orange folder.

Shocked by the text, I reread the message over and over till it had no meaning anymore. I started to eye up the Jack Daniel's sitting on the counter, and with a deeply rooted selfishness, I grabbed the bottle and chugged. The fake future I'd created with Lydia hit me like a freight train as I pulled myself together and got ready.

When I got to the diner, I stared out the window and watched the rain pour, taking sips from the bottle of Jack. Looking down at the orange folder, I remembered the memories

Lydia and I created and the love I'd felt for her. The clock struck twelve as the thunder roared overhead. With a sigh, I pulled out the papers one at a time and signed them, tears rolling gently down my cheeks. Looking out the window through the rain, I watched Lydia get out of the Cadillac and walk into the diner, but the car was empty this time. Before I opened the door, I looked at the passenger seat and picked up a photograph. I looked at us one last time, a happily engaged couple, kissing at the top of the Eiffel Tower before slipping the photo in the orange folder and heading inside.

Indigo

Emily Barber



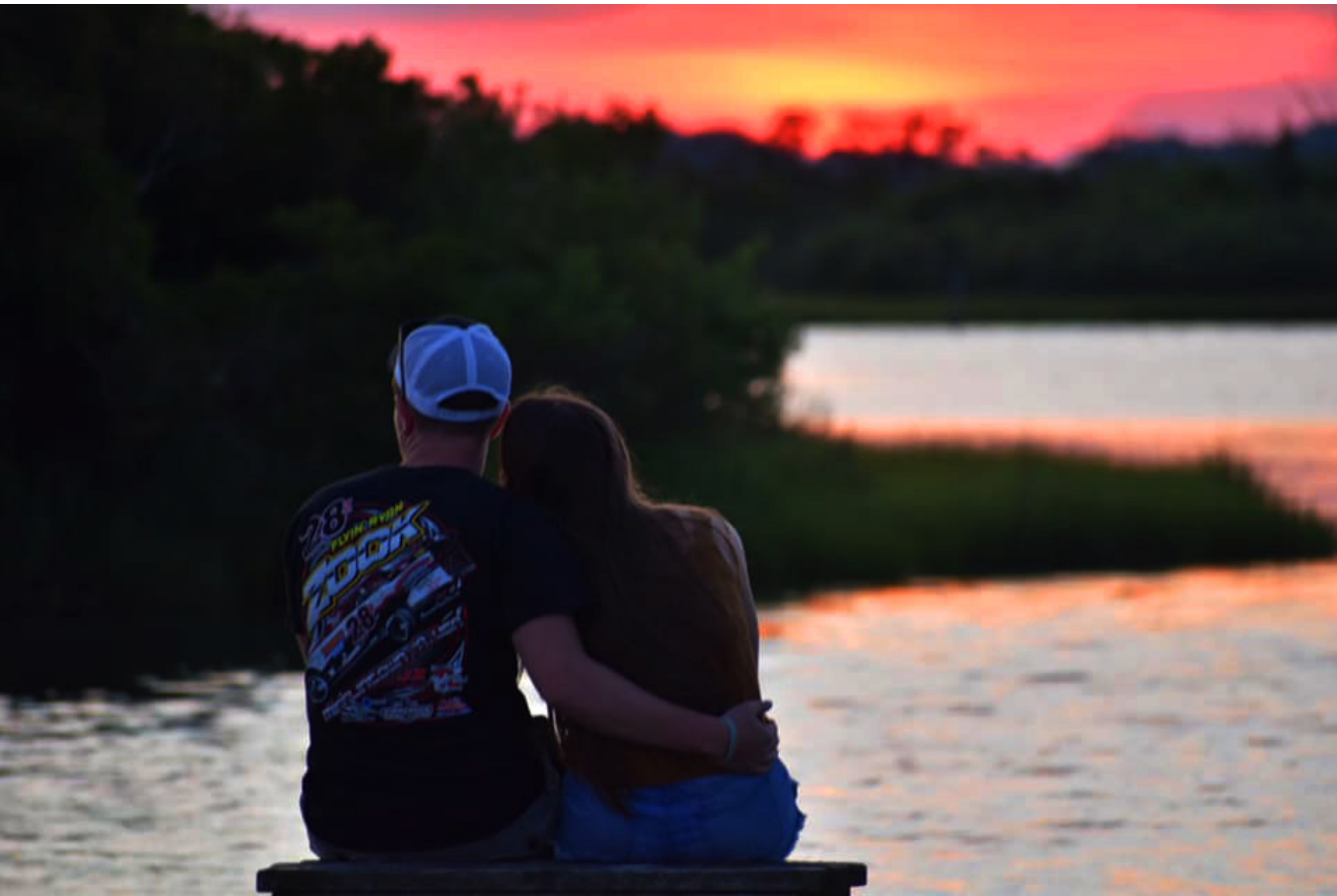
Our Porch, Our Place

Jayln Maulfair

Sweet chirps and warmth fill the air on these summer mornings.
As I sit on my porch, admiring the beautiful pops of orange and yellow light expelled by the rising sun from my chair,
The door swings open,
And out comes the boy I spent my high school years adoring.
He sits down next me and softly tussles my hair.
I look up at him,
The waking sun illuminating his speckled-green eyes.
He holds a warm cup of dark-roast coffee towards me,
And I sip it slowly as we take in the beauty from our porch chairs.
We spend our morning waiting for the sleepy world to come to life:
Watching the neighbors take their dogs on their morning walks,
The bees busily going about their tasks,
The sprinklers spritzing the quenched lawns,
And the cars zooming past our road, each with their own, unique destination.
But,
After the hustle and bustle of the morning is finished,
There is a lull, and the porch grows quiet.
He plays some music, and we lay back,
Savoring the final quiet moments of the morning.
Completely content, I think to myself:
This is my person.
This is our morning.
This porch is our place.

Sunset Over Assateague Island

Addison Fry



Can You Breathe?

Hannah Soden

The thoughts come in waves;
Make me feel numb.
Why does it feel
Like I'm on the run
From my own thoughts?
Slow down! I try to,
But when I stop,
The waves
Consume me.

Those inconvenient waves
Hit me in stupid ways,
Like picking at my hair

Or scratching at my skin.
Now I'm standing up in class

With waves washing over me,
Hoping this, too, shall pass.
I'll smile while I wonder
How long I can hold my breath.

Stardust Vibes

Alexis Trionfo



This is
STARDUST

Scallops

Samantha Seely

The day was hot and the water cool against our skin as we swam through shallow waters thick with brown-green seaweed, a dark patch of color in the sandy bay. Even with the snorkel, you could taste the salt of the water, and if you ducked too far down, water would surge into the tube that was your line to the sky. It was quiet underwater despite the distant splashes and laughter. And then you spot it, there, nearly hidden — a brief flash of sapphire light among the seaweed and the silver-gray fish. There's a still moment where you watch, transfixed by the sparkling blue dots, appearing and reappearing in the sun with the rhythm of your heartbeat, until you reach down with your gloved hand and grab the living shell, pulling open the netted bag and slipping it inside with the others. Eventually, when the bag is full and you've begun to stray a little too far from the rest of your family you turn back, dragging the weight of your finds behind you in the water. Your grandfather is sitting on the edge of the boat with his own bag, and, as he sees you making your way over, he grins and yells, "Look at you! You're the queen of scalloping. You're just finding them left and right." The praise sinks into your skin like the rays of the sun and the salt in the water and you grin.

...

For much of my childhood summer vacations meant getting in a car with my parents and brothers, driving down until we met up with my Granddaddy and whichever aunts, uncles, or cousins were joining us this time, before driving the rest of the way to Cape San Blas, Florida. It was a small town on a peninsula on the Gulf of Mexico that was a short drive to Apalachicola and a shorter walk

to the beach. In the daytime, we would spend our time on the beach, swimming and playing in the waves; in the evening we would walk along the shore with flashlights, looking for the pale white crabs that would emerge from holes in the sand.

But the highlight of the week was always the day we would rent a boat and go scalloping in the nearby St. Joseph's bay. We'd pack our lunches and bring an extra cooler, empty except for ice. My grandfather would pilot the boat out onto the bay, expertly guiding it to the shallow patches of seaweed. He'd slow down, looking over the edge into the water. When he was finally satisfied with what he saw and stopped the boat, we would climb down the ladder into the water one by one with our mesh bags and snorkels.

Scallops are a type of clam, with the classic seashell shape and ridges. They live among seaweed, and they filter the water for nutrients by opening and closing their shell. The ones in St. Joseph's bay were usually a dark brown or greenish-gray, blending in with the weeds. The trick to finding them was looking for their eyes — the muscle along the opening of their shell is lined with around 40 tiny blue spots that sparkle when the sunlight hits them just right.

We'd search through the water, picking up the mollusks carefully and placing them in our bags. When the bag was full, we would bring it back to the boat, where Granddaddy would take out his knife and pry them open, cutting out the small, round white meat to place into ziplock bags and then into the empty cooler of ice.

That night we'd come home tired and a little sunburnt and cook them. We'd bake them, sauté them, or fry them. It didn't really matter to me; they were all delicious, and their tender, buttery flavor brought a small burst of pride and accomplishment in the fact that I had helped gather them myself. For a

long time, scallops were the only seafood I would eat, and even now they remain my favorite. They were a sort of treat, something we would get to have just once a year. Although I occasionally asked my parents if we could have scallops at home, we almost never did. Scallops were something close to sacred, part of a family ritual. If scallops were some other food, if Granddaddy preferred, say, fly fishing to scalloping, that other food would have taken on that sacredness instead, just by virtue of being the food my extended family would gather around and prepare together, a connection as much as a meal.

Or perhaps not. Their link to my family undeniably affected my love for them, but the process of gathering scallops tapped into a part of my imagination that something like fly fishing never could. Floating in the water, gently searching for them and watching the way the weeds swayed in the invisible currents of the bay — it felt like being let in on a secret. It felt like magic.

This was a time in my life where magic was still very real to me, real in every way that mattered. I was a child who escaped to books, and found a home in fantasy worlds with magical creatures and girls who'd rather wield a sword than sit in a tower, books where the pages told stories of adventure and friendship and succeeding against all odds.

I believed in all of the mythological creatures that found their way into my books — unicorns and pegasi, dragons and griffins — but mermaids in particular fascinated me. They were so similar to people, but so far separated from our ordinary world. They were beautiful, and depending on which book you were reading, were incredibly dangerous or incredibly kind, or both. I was still holding onto the hope that I would someday turn into one, or, failing that, at least meet one. When we went scalloping, it all seemed possible.

One summer, I convinced my parents to buy me a book from one of the tourist shops in Apalachicola titled “The Secret World of Mermaids.” It was one of those books made to resemble an old tome, and it proclaimed to be the definitive guide to mermaids. It broke down the categories of mermaids (shipsavers, wishgivers, shapeshifters, weatherworkers), the species within each category, what the mermaid language looks like, their relationship to humans. It even came with little painted plastic figurines, one for each category. I would spend hours with this book, rereading it, staring, entranced by the illustrations. It captivated me, quickly becoming one of my favorite books. I found a kind of comfort in its quiet insistence that magic exists in this world beyond the pages, that mermaids were real and if you look out at the ocean at night and see a splash, you might just have spotted one.

Although all the types of mermaids were interesting, I was most interested in the wishgiver mermaids. They made their homes in freshwater, living in ponds and waterfalls and wells, and, as one might guess from the name, they granted wishes. The book described them as being filled with love and sympathy for people, but also reclusive, preferring to keep their distance. Yet their ability to see the future and change reality made them the most powerful mermaids, at least as far as magic went. I liked the idea of that — that you could be shy and still have your own might.

If you wanted your wish granted, the book suggested leaving gifts for the mermaids near their waters — shiny coins beside a waterfall, some fresh fruit on the shore of a pond, stories whispered into a well. I thought about what I would ask for all the time. My wish would change from week to week, but I always circled back around to asking if they could

make me a mermaid too, giving me belonging in that underwater world full of magic and wonder, giving me freedom in a set of gills.

I don't know for sure that, given the opportunity now, I would ask for anything different. The idea of being in a world filled with magic never really loses its appeal.

As I grew older, the trips to Cape San Blas, once the highlight of the year, became less frequent. Some years we wouldn't go at all. In the years we did go, when we took a rented boat out into the bay and my grandfather searched the patches of seaweed for the tale-tell sign of scallops hidden in the water, we wouldn't find any. Each year, there were fewer and fewer spots of scallops, and the season for scalloping was restricted to a shorter and shorter period of time, or even cancelled all together.

What was happening with the scallops wasn't ever explained to me. It was just a slow disappearance, a growing sadness as we gradually stopped hoping for the scallops to appear at all when we went out onto the bay.

Only when I started writing this piece, years after the scallops seemed to vanish and our annual trips to the coast ended, did I find out what had happened to them. Unsurprisingly, the cause of the scallops' decline was people. Although overfishing of scallops played a role, toxic algae build ups known as red tides were the primary cause. The name comes from how, when there's enough build-up, the algae can turn the water the color of rust. For the most part, however, they're invisible. Though they can happen naturally on a rare basis, a combination of air pollution, urban run-off, coastal development, and the rising temperatures and CO2 levels caused by climate change have all contributed to the red tide events happening more frequently, increasing algae to dangerous, catastrophic levels. Red tides are devastating for a variety

of animals and sea life, but scallops and other types of shellfish are particularly vulnerable to red tides. For the scallops in St. Joseph's Bay, it meant near eradication. For me, it meant asking when we were going scalloping, and being told "not this year, sweetie." It meant not realizing there had been an end until long after it had passed.

That's how it is with these things, isn't it? You believe in mermaids with all your heart, clutching to plastic figurines and worn pages, thinking about the day you'll get to see one yourself. And then your grip loosens, and time passes, and a year or two later, when your aunt asks if you still like mermaids, you realize you don't believe in them anymore, not even a little bit. It hits you with surprise and pain, and you try to convince yourself that they're real, they must be. But that battle was lost months ago, without you even noticing. There is real pain in the loss. We grieve for who we used to be, for the world that only ever existed in our minds.

As I got older the long days in the sun and water and sand, the wild wonder of discovering secret jewels under the ocean waters, faded to become another memory of childhood, along with the belief in mermaids and magic. They are all tied together for me, fixtures in my life I struggled to hold onto, that I lost to time all the same. There's no small degree of longing for that time, the sweet innocence and joy of it all.

When I started writing this piece, I didn't know what the state the scallops that defined my childhood summers were in. The last time we went to Florida was the summer before my senior year of high school. It was the first time I had seen my extended family and gone to Cape San Blas since early middle school, but there weren't any scallops to be found that year. Since that last trip nearly five years ago I hadn't heard any news about what happened

with Cape San Blas and the scallops. I had to know what happened, even if that news hurt, and so I began to search online for information.

Red tides and loss were not the end of the story, after all.

Since 2016, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has steadily increased their scallop restoration efforts. Restricting and cancelling scallop seasons, placing tens of thousands of scallops into restoration cages that protect them from predators and encourage reproduction, introducing hatchery-raised juvenile scallops into the bay.

The best part is that these efforts — they've been working. The scallops have recovered. Not quickly, not without help, and the work is far from over. But the scallops are there, once again dotting the sea floor, healthy and steadily increasing in number. The first full scallop season in years was seen in 2019,

with plenty of scallops remaining in the bay afterwards that continue to thrive. When I first found out, I couldn't help but cry the happy sort of tears that come with receiving good news against all odds.

It's not a guarantee that things are perfect or will be good forever. There could be more red tide events like the ones that collapsed the scallop population, a future that seems likely if the root causes of the problem are not addressed. And it seems unlikely that I myself will return to Cape San Blas to look for scallops, too, at least not in the near future — my grandfather is getting older and more forgetful, and money is tight as always.

Nevertheless, there's a kind of quiet happiness in finding out that some other girl who stares into the ocean at night, looking and hoping for that distant splash, that proof of magic, will have her chance to find the living spots of sapphire among the seaweed and sand.



Come Sail Away

Ezekiel Ciafre



In Memoriam

Sarah Kaden

I've yet to find a touch that's more perfect
than yours, because you purge my deepest pain
from failing body. You're my muse: subject
of all my art, the love that keeps me sane.
I'm on my knees for you, and you I'll sate;
this little death is yours to take and bursts
from me. In your sweet hands I'll place my weight,
so take me into you, make me immersed.

But love from you is only bile and tears:
you stain me, leave me broken and distraught.
The best you gave me were these groundless fears,
and when it's done, I wonder why I fought.
Across the toilet bent, my breath is smote;
my life is flowing forth from sickened throat.

Picture Perfect

Ryan Strohl



This is not a poem

Rachel Nelson

This is not a poem
Full of flowers and frills.
This is not a poem
That fills the heart with chills.

This is not a poem
With a rhyme or a reason,
Or one that describes
A wintry season.

These similar-sounding words
Are just happenstance.
This is not a poem;
No, not a chance.
What I write is
Pure,
Maddening,
Utter nonsense—
The kind that'll drive
Your skull to the fence.

So ha ha, ha ha,
I'll keep wasting your time,
Making some jokes
Without reason or rhyme.

Ablaze

Hannah McConnell



Nadie

James Moyer

She dipped her hands into the river, and she found life.

The bed crawled with crayfish. Nadie, the wise one, plucked them from their holes as if drawn by maternal claws.

It was late summer; the current was slow and the animals sluggish. Mud was moldable then, and Nadie plunged her fingers about the burrows and pinched until the curious things popped like beans from the pod. Placing them in her mother's basket, she smiled an ancient smile.

"We are much alike," she mused.

The black of their backs glistened in the evening sun. Mingan's hunting party would return soon.

The call came when the basket was half full. It was high but deep like the river. It resonated with the earth, reverberated through the trees.

Nadie heard her grandfather Nixkamich in the sound. She saw them sitting on the shores of the great Susquehanna, his ash pole piercing the sky. He had spun her the stories of the family, sung her the songs of the warriors, bequeathed her the knowledge of the elders. The spirit of the land was in him; the light of truth shined through his eyes.

The call fell silent, but his presence lingered. It was his voice she heard, summoning her home. He was the wind—she knew for she was wise. It was his hand upon her cheek, his fingers stirring the grass: she saw the branches swaying, and she knew.

week-night ritual

Liam Coverdale

sleeping with my phone
scrolling through twitter, thinking
(this bed feels empty)

Oh of Fruit and Wildflowers!

Paige Keyser

The ground astride; array of fallen fruit—
A bruise upon salaks, guavas, ackees;
The floor bedlam. The sweetest spores remain
With scents of vanilla n' berries strike
The nose at peace. Around a throne of wood
Lie gilded roses born once blanche and holds
The long papyrus plant and wildflower lace.
The room aloud with jazz in the wild of song;
The still of polished shoes belongs to her.
In ma'am's own hands, sapodilla in halves—
The fruit of womanhood. Her auburn hair
That holds in place the passion fruit of blooms.
The righteous queen of the wild; oh the wild. She shucks
Along the meat, to free the seed, and loves
Until the wildflowers grow. The woman stands
With eyes of fire and dress of nature's bless.

Portrait of a Patient Woman

Madeline Plank





Fine Print is the literary and arts magazine at Elizabethtown College. The student-run publication features works of fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, and art created by members of the College.

